Greetings 6th Grade Families,

My name is Mackenzie Gibbs and I am a faculty member in the Science/CompSci departments here at Academy. I am looking forward to having your child in my 6th grade TechApps class this year. We will be exploring several different aspects of our technological world, primarily focusing on digital citizenship, productivity tools, researching skills, and basic programming & web design.

We'll start off the year in a combined unit of productivity tools (think Google Drive) and digital ethics & citizenship. In our increasingly complex digital world, these skills and topics are hugely important to bring to pre-teen attention. Some of the topics I am particularly excited to discuss are cyber security, respecting intellectual property & the creative work of others, and building a positive online identity/online footprint. By looking at both pitfalls and successes in navigating the online world, the hope is that these will be skills your children can take with them long into the future as they develop into digital leaders.

During the next phase of class, we will be partnered with our Community & Global Citizenship department to design and code websites in support of community topics that personally matter to each student. This web design will be done through HTML & CSS (which we will be exploring in tandem with community service). JavaScript will be optional. My hope is that students will find this unit of study rewarding and personalized to them, as they will be coding a vibrant website from plain text about a topic they're passionate about. It should be a thrill to see this all come to life!

The final unit in this class is where things start to get really fun: programming in Scratch! Scratch is an excellent tool for developing computational thinking, designed exactly for that purpose by students at MIT. It is a free, web-based program. Feel free to visit the website (scratch.mit.edu) and play around in there yourself! Allowing the students to combine creativity and their coding skills in a fun environment will be a fantastic conclusion to our year.

I am very excited for all that's to come this year!

In terms of general technology at school, Albuquerque Academy uses the Canvas learning management system. Each teacher has a course in Canvas, which allows them to post assignments and support materials to help students stay organized and do homework independently after school hours. Your children will be expected to check both Canvas and their school email account daily for class information. However, Canvas is not a substitute for students taking careful assignment notes in their planners!

Students are issued a Chromebook to use during the school day. Chromebooks are housed in family heads' classrooms/offices and are held there overnight. Your students have been briefed on the use expectations for these devices, including basic care and remembering to charge it at the end of each day.

Students will need to bring headphones/earbuds and some classes may require flash drives. Please make sure to label these tiny tech devices so that we can return any lost/misplaced equipment to its rightful owner.

I am beyond thrilled to be working with you and your children this year!

Sincerely,

Mackenzie M Gibbs

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